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ABSTRACT

Consistent with educational reform efforts, regular educators are being asked to meet the challenge of addressing the needs of special education and at-risk students along with "normal" students in the regular classroom. This paper examines how teacher education programs can assist in better preparing educators to meet this challenge and describes the use of collaboration skill training at Bowling Green State University (Ohio). Project RAISE (Rural America Institute for Special Educators) supported a preservice teacher training program in rural special education at the graduate level. The program paired veteran teachers with first-year novice teachers working together in carrying out cooperative planning, teaching, and evaluation. Both mentor and mentee were eligible to receive Masters Degrees upon completion of coursework. The primary emphasis of course content dealt with learning collaboration skills in order to enhance service delivery for rural special education. Brief descriptions of courses are provided. This model, while designed for special education, could easily be adapted for use in any preservice or inservice teacher training program. (Contains 12 references.) (LL)

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Collaboration: A Potential Solution in Teacher Education for Addressing At-Risk and Special Education Students in Today's Schools

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Introduction

The last half of the 20th Century has been filled with various calls for educational reform. The decades of the 1970's and 1980's have had particular emphasis on reform movements for special students and at-risk students. The 1970's saw the reform movement for special education through PL 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. This reform called for free appropriate public education of special students in the Least Restrictive Environment. More recently, this landmark legislation for special students has been modified by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 which reemphasized mainstreaming or educating special students in the regular classroom, whenever possible. Thus, it would appear that reform for the special education student will result in greater numbers of special students being placed in the regular education classroom.

Calls for educational reform have also been issued on behalf of the at-risk students in our schools. Beginning in 1983 with the National Commission on Excellence in Education's report, A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform, to the National Governors' Association report, Time for Results: The Governors' 1991 Report, there has been a wave to restructure school organizations to meet the needs of at-risk students. Some of the current reform movements have been addressing at-risk students in school drop-out situations; in juvenile criminal justice programs; in student substance abuse situations; and in situations where children are living in poverty. The at-risk student may be served by these prevention-type or remediation-type programs in regular classrooms. Thus, we find regular educators being asked to meet the challenge of addressing the needs of special

education students and at-risk students along with "normal" students in the regular classroom. Are the teachers ready to take on this challenge?

What can teacher education do to help teachers become better prepared to face the challenge of educating at-risk and special students in the regular class? One potential key is through teacher skill training in the area of collaboration. This presentation highlights the use of collaboration skill training in one university teacher training program.

The primary focus of the collaboration skill training rests in a problem-solving process. Teachers (preservice and practicing) can be taught to use this problem-solving process to address the unique needs that are exhibited by special students and at-risk students in the regular classroom. The philosophy behind this collaborative/problem-solving approach is that we educators are <u>all</u> responsible for educating <u>all</u> students. We're in this educational system together and we need to collaborate and problem solve if we are to meet the challenge of educating at-risk and special students in regular classrooms in the decade of the 1990's and beyond. This presentation will give teacher educators some insights and suggestions on how they might include collaboration skill training in their respective teacher education programs.

<u>Collaboration Between Regular and Special Teachers</u>

> It is clear that major changes are needed in the delivery of service to problem learners, and that these services need to be the responsibility of regular as well as special educators. It is also clear that teachers are the central players in bringing about change in practice. It follows, then, that our greatest and most pressing challenge in the reform effort is to determine how to improve the quality of instruction at the classroom level. (Keough, 1990, p. 190)

The future for regular and special educators working more closely together seems rather certain. Isolated separate programs for special needs students appear to be a practice belonging to past history. The future education for special needs students is filled with a challenge of joint

responsibility between regular and special education programs and personnel. Similarly, large numbers of children in regular classrooms who are failing or academically at-risk but whose needs are not being met because they do not meet the eligibility criteria for special education, will have the opportunity of getting additional assistance through a merger of efforts between regular and special education teachers (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987). This movement toward joining forces between special and regular education has been referred to as the Regular Education Initiative (REI). The REI emphasizes the joining of demonstrably effective practices from special, compensatory and general education to establish a general education system that's more inclusive and better able to serve all students, particularly those who require greater than usual educational support (Reynolds, Wang & Walberg, 1987).

While not all of the experts in the fields of regular and special education are fully sold on the concepts embraced by the Regular Education Initiative, there is a definite movement toward merging efforts of these two distinct educational subsystems of regular and special education in order to address the needs of all students. Morsink, Thomas and Correa (1991) point out that "the most promising proposals for improving school's responsiveness to the increased number of students who are handicapped or at-risk are those that include the features of teacher empowerment, shared `ownership' of problems, and the common goal of providing each student with the best possible program" (p. 24). One way in which this shared ownership and empowerment can be accomplished is through collaborative efforts. While the "name game" persists even with what we should call this collaboration (e.g. consultation, teaming, teacher assistance teams, intervention assistance teams, building level teams, prereferral teams, interdisciplinary teams, collaborative consultation, interactive teaming, etc.), there appears to be a growing

acceptance among professional educators that we need to become involved in some form of collaborative endeavors if we are to work together in sharing responsibility of educating all students.

Collaboration just doesn't happen in schools. According to Phillips and McCullough (1990), schools will need to develop precise guidelines for developing systems of collaborative consultation, cooperative teaching and teaming. Not only will schools need to provide inservice training for their teachers on developing collaborative working techniques, but preservice teacher institutions will also need to assist beginning teachers in developing collaborative consultation competencies (West & Brown, 1987). One sample model for teaching collaborative consultation skills can be found in a government grant program at Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio.

A Model Teacher Training Program for Collaboration

From 1989 to 1992, a federal grant project was in operation at Bowling Green State University. Project RAISE (Rural America Institute for Special Educators) was a three (3) year grant from the United States Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services that supported a preservice teacher training program in rural special education at the graduate level. This program paired practicing veteran teachers in rural special education with first year novice teachers in special education. These mentor/mentee teaching pairs team taught in the rural classroom of the mentor teacher. In addition to team teaching, they completed coursework from Bowling Green State University leading to a Masters Degree in Special Education with particular emphasis given to collaboration for rural special education personnel.

The mentor and the mentee took turns coming to campus during the school day for their coursework. When one of the pair would be on campus for

coursework, the other would be teaching in the rural special education class. At the end of one academic year and one summer, both the mentor and mentee were eligible to receive their Masters Degree upon successful completion of coursework. This allowed mentor teachers to earn a Masters Degree without giving up their contracts, salaries or credit for teaching experience. This project also allowed the mentee teachers to gain one year of mentored teaching experience at the same time they were earning a Masters Degree.

The primary emphasis of the course content dealt with learning collaboration skills in order to enhance service delivery for rural special education. The following courses were included in the Masters Degree Program for Project RAISE:

EDSE 649: Problems and Issues for Personnel in Rural Special Education, 3 semester hours.
EDSE 680: Foundations and Instructional Strategies for Rural Special Education, 3 semester hours.
EDSE 680: Advanced Instructional Design for Rural Special Education, 3 semester hours.
EDSE 680: Collaboration for Related Educational Services - I, 3 semester hours.
EDSE 680: Collaboration for Related Educational Services - II, 3 semester hours.
EDSE 680: Consultation Skills for Rural Special Education, 3 semester hours.
EDSE 641: Practicum in Rural Special Education - 1, 6 semester hours.
EDSE 642: Practicum in Rural Special Education - II, 6 semester hours.
EDFI 696: Statistics in Education, 3 semester hours.
EDFI 697: Research in Education, 3 semester hours.
EDSE 699: Thesis Research, 3 semester hours.
EDSE 680: Professional Development Seminar in Special Education, 1 semester hour.

A brief description follows for each of the courses in the project:

EDSE 649: Problems and Issues for Personnel in Rural Special Education, was modified and related to an understanding of the context of a rural school and its environment as well as knowledge concerning the state-of-the-art of rural special education.

EDSE 680: Foundations and Instructional Strategies for Rural Special Education, a new course, was designed to promote understanding of the differences involved in serving handicapped students in rural and urban environments as well as knowledge of effective service delivery models for rural handicapped children (including low-incidence handicaps such as severely emotionally disturbed, hearing impaired and visually impaired).

EDSE 680: Advanced Instructional Design for Rural Special Education, a new course, was designed to address the awareness of alternate resources to provide services to rural handicapped students and skills to identify alternate resources.

EDSE 680: Collaboration for Related Educational Services - I, a new course, was designed to introduce skills needed in working with citizens and agencies in rural communities to facilitate cooperation among schools and service agencies to serve handicapped students.

EDSE 680: Collaboration for Related Educational Services - II, a new course, was designed to facilitate an understanding of personal development skills (a) for their own professional growth and (b) to build a local support system in their rural environment.

EDSE 680: Consultation Skills for Rural Special Education, a new course, was designed to include concepts and competencies on skills in working with parents of rural handicapped students and, developing skills in working with peer professionals from rural environments.

The following courses required minimal modification for use in Project RAISE. These courses already existed, and are presently offered in the program of graduate students.

EDFI 696: Statistics in Education provides participants with knowledge and skills related to statistics as a tool in education and research, and will include descriptive statistics, transformation of scores, sampling and probability, linear correlation and regression, introduction to statistical difference, and basic tests of significance. Further, this course provides participants skills in using statistical methods unique to special populations.

EDFI 697: Research in Education provides participants with knowledge and skills related to research and includes identification and evaluation of research problems, research designs, use of library resources, data gathering, and writing research reports. Unique to Project RAISE, this course includes the identification and planning of research projects relative to rural special education settings which team members will then complete during the later phases of project participation.

EDSE 699: Thesis Research provides participants with both credit and structure for completion of their research projects defined in EDFI 697.

EDSE 680: Professional Development Seminar in Special Education provides participants with advisement regarding the graduate program in special education. This course includes information on available support services for graduate students, faculty research, areas of specialization, forms needing attention for completion of graduate studies, and other related topics.

Practicum Experiences. The level of a participant's expertise can best be determined by how well s/he integrates what has been learned into everyday experiences. Participants in Project RAISE had the opportunity to apply what they learned in the environment for which they were being prepared to teach. Authentic practicum situations, rural special education settings, allowed the

participants to apply what they learned, and at the same time receive assistance from a supervisor which enabled further improvement of skills. Practicum experiences in Project RAISE were scheduled for completion as participants enrolled in both EDSE 662: Practicum in Rural Special Education - 1, and EDSE 662: Practicum in Rural Special Education - II. These practicum experiences were coordinated with the content coursework so that each practicum course emphasized specific knowledge and skills. Each practicum experience allowed for periodic on-site observations, and were evaluated through multiple means (e.g., supervisor evaluation, team teacher evaluation).

EDSE 662: Practicum in Rural Special Education - I provided participants with a supervised teaching experience in a rural special education setting. In particular, this practicum experience emphasized those skills attained in EDSE 680: Foundations and Instructional Strategies for Rural Special Education, EDSE 680: Advanced Instructional Design for Rural Special Education, and EDSE 680: Collaboration for Related Educational Services - I.

EDSE 662: Practicum in Rural Special Education - II provided participants with a second supervised teaching experience in a rural special education setting. In particular, this second practicum experience emphasized those skills attained in EDSE 680: Consultation Skills for Rural Special Education, and EDSE 680: Collaboration for Related Educational Services - II.

These practica provided participants with a rich experience in which they were able to display their knowledge and skills attained concerning the provision of special education services for rural school populations. These experiences also provided the project administration, who supervised the experiences, the opportunity to observe and evaluate each participant's learning and application of the identified competencies.

Upon completion of these courses, the Project RAISE participants had the opportunity to develop: a) knowledge of particular characteristics related to rural schools and rural environments; b) knowledge of the needs involved in the service delivery of special education in rural settings; and c) skills needed to use collaboration as a tool for expanding special education service needs for rural school districts. In addition, a one year mentoring program was accomplished. The mentor and mentee teams completed their Masters Degrees in one academic year and one summer period of time. Further, the participants engaged in rural special education research and numerous collaborative projects.

While the primary focus of this teacher inservice/preservice training program emanated from Special Education Teacher Training, the collaborative skills were applied to activities that expanded the scope of the special educator outside of their own special education classrooms. Examples of the collaboration projects included in the Teacher Training Project included the following:

Community Resources Collaboration Project. Teachers were taught collaborative skills to use in working with a specific community resource. (e.g., American Red Cross, Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation, local banks, etc.)

Auxiliary Services Collaboration Project. Teachers were taught collaborative skills to use in working with support services within their school district. (e.g., School Psychologist, Guidance Counselor, Speech Therapist, etc.)

Systems Change Project. Teachers were taught collaborative skills to use in making changes within the school system. (e.g., Mainstreaming Practices, Grading Practices, Working with At-Risk Students, etc.)

Staff Development Collaboration Project. Teachers were taught collaborative skills to use in developing staff development programs at school. (e.g., Inservices on Mainstreaming, Attention Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder, Competency Testing, Collaboration, etc.)

Parent Collaboration Project. Teachers were taught collaborative skills to use in working with parents. (e.g., Parent Support Groups, Parent Newsletters, Parent Volunteer Groups, etc.)

Mainstreaming Collaboration Project. Teachers were taught collaborative skills to use in mainstreaming students into the regular classroom. (e.g., IEP Involvement, Homework, Instructional Accommodations, etc.)

Volunteer Collaboration Project. Teachers were taught collaborative skills to use in developing volunteer projects. (e.g., Peer Tutoring, Senior Citizen Volunteer Projects, Student Volunteer Service Projects, etc.)

In addition to the preceding projects, collaborative assignments were inherent within the very nature of the grant project. The mentor teacher and mentee teacher worked together in carrying out cooperative planning, teaching and evaluation. They also worked together to conduct research on various research topics. While this model for teacher training was developed and used in a Special Education Teacher Training Program, it could be easily adapted to use in any teacher training inservice or preservice program.

In the best of all possible worlds, regular and special education teachers work with all students. There is no reason for the skills of special education teachers to be restrictively applied only to students with handicaps or disabilities. Similarly, the benefits of education with people without handicaps or disabilities for students with special learning needs are widely accepted. There is no reason special areas of instruction such as sign language or study skills should be taught only to some students. Any student needs to learn what any other student needs to learn to be better able to get along in the world of the future. Just as it was judged unfair to segregate students of color in separate but equal facilities because of the stigma attached to separation and because of the deprivation of interaction with students of other backgrounds, it should be judged unfair to separate and restrict learning experiences on the basis of perceived need (unless the need is judged universal) or learning characteristics. There is no reason special education and regular education have to be organized and have to function as they do today. The models for collaborative teaching have simply not been clearly articulated, proposed, and practiced. (Ysseldyke, Algozzine & Thurlow, 1992, p. 370).

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